

The Builder.

No. CXL

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 11, 1845.



THE main object of the Cottage Improvement Society for Northumberland, founded October 1841, and remodelled 18th October, 1844 (Lord Howick in the chair),

is "to diffuse information as to the progress which shall be actually made in erecting an improved description of cottages in Northumberland, to point out their localities, to circulate, by means of the reports, useful plans and elevations, and, above all, to shew the importance of providing at least two habitable rooms, in those new cottages which are gradually replacing the old ones as they fall into decay."

The report of the committee for 1845 is just published, and contains plans, sections, and elevations of three different pairs of cottages erected on the estate of the Duke of Northumberland; of three cottages, and of six cottages at Swinhoe (Mr. Tewart's estate); and of a pair of cottages and a single cottage on the Ministeracres estate.

So far as "providing at least two habitable rooms," the object is certainly attained by the plans published; but beyond this they go a very little way. They add nothing to our previous knowledge on the subject, no new mode of husbanding warmth, improving the ventilation, or ensuring good drainage; no good method of forming a floor, at once cheap, strong, warm, dry, easily cleaned, and that would not remain damp long after washing (a great desideratum); no advantageous fresh adaptation of materials, efficient casement, or useful suggestions as to the supply of water. In fact, as to the most important points here alluded to, namely, ventilation, drainage, and supply of water, no reference whatever is made to them in any one of the descriptions accompanying the plans. In some of the cottages given, the fire-places are in the external walls, without any necessity for such an unwise arrangement, and in nearly all of them the floor is on the level of the ground.

The publication of fresh suggestions and new arrangements, even if not found advantageous ultimately, induces discussion, elicits facts, and advances the object; but in these plans, simply one step in advance of the ancient dens for labourers, there is positively nothing to discuss; and we cannot see that one good end will be served by the publication of them.

In speaking thus strongly of these plans, we do not desire in any way to impeach the judgment of the society. In one of their regulations, the committee invite the parochial clergy, and all ministers of religion, to afford them "notice of any remarkable improvement that may have been effected in cottages under their observations," and offer publicity to "communications from landowners and others, as to any improvement in cottages, cottage-gardens, or other matters bearing upon the comfort of the labourer, more especially as to the plans which may have been followed, and the outlay incurred;" and we may safely conclude, that they have published the best examples they could get. The inference that should be drawn from our remarks is, simply, that much attention to the subject is yet wanted in Northumberland. We trust the efforts of the society

to induce this attention will be successful. The following remarks on the improvement desired (from the "Postscript" to the Report), written by the Rev. E. Feilde, of Rennington, may be usefully quoted:—

"The present period appears decidedly favourable for a movement of this nature. We are now in the enjoyment of a national peace. In the agitations of warfare, when the struggle is for existence as a nation, it is difficult to draw public attention to what are regarded the secondary subjects of convenience and embellishment. But opportunity has been afforded for cultivating the arts of peace; and the upper and middle classes have extensively profited by them: for their accommodation chiefly, hills have been levelled, valleys filled up, and the roughest places made smooth, and exclusive roads constructed at an almost fabulous expense. As these gigantic undertakings advance through Northumberland, it is hoped that the new dwellings for the officers and servants connected with them will be constructed on the commodious and decent model of the rooms, which it is the object of this society to recommend. As the country is opened to successive trains of travellers, it is consoling to reflect, that fewer one-roomed tenements will meet their sight, and that many hovels which offended the eye some ten years back, are transformed into becoming and convenient habitations.

A dingy and barbarous cottage may suit a dark and barbarous age; but in the present days of improved knowledge, a wider diffusion of domestic comfort, something a little beyond bare walls and perforated earth floors, and patched windows, may reasonably be looked for at the hands of those who can afford the indulgence."

"The present generation is a reading one, and must, therefore, be more or less a thoughtful one; and it is well for a people, when beginning to relish the charms of contemplative life, to find kindly natures disposed to meet, as far as possible, their new-born tastes and wishes. Little opportunity is offered for fire-side reading during our long winter evenings, in a confined room, where every conceivable operation of domestic economy is carried on, and which is not impervious to the weather from above, from below, and around. Is it to be wondered at, that the well-sanded floor of the beer-shop and public house (with all their evil concomitants), are sometimes sought in preference?"

Proofs have been given of the advantages to human life which have followed sanitary regulations in towns and cities. These latter are, through legislative interference, beginning to enjoy the resources of science which have been applied with success to the dwellings of the upper classes. It is idle to suppose that the mere fresh air of the country is all-powerful to prevent epidemics in villages, and to remedy the defects of a confined locality. Besides, the summer breezes blow but for a very limited period in the north, and the cottager requires defence at all times against the prevailing damp of this district. These requirements made good in the shape of a well-drained and weather-tight cottage, added to the blazing fire, will impart a relish to the homeliest fare, and a sense of comfort which will brighten the countenance."

The reverend writer, in concluding, refers to the establishment of the "Society for the improvement of the condition of the Labouring Classes," whose first work when commenced, namely, the model-houses near Bagpiggie Wells Tavern, Pentonville, was mentioned by us with reprehension in the first page of the present volume.

These houses are now nearly finished, and we deeply regret to say, without any attempt to remedy the egregious mistake committed—a mistake that appears perfectly extraordinary when we read the names of the gentlemen composing the committee. We fancied at first that the arrangement of the model houses must be unknown to them, but inasmuch as it is stated in the committee's report almost in a congratulatory tone, that the new buildings "are in the form of a court," we

are no longer permitted to think so. The following is the whole passage in the report that refers to the houses in question:—

"With respect to the improvement of the dwellings of the poor, the special committee on that subject had held thirty-six meetings, and their results demanded the serious attention of the public. It was not in the power of the committee to say that they had determined on the most convenient and best form on which to model the cottages of the poor, but they had encouraged the publication of designs for that purpose, and from the information thus collected they were prepared to construct such cottages on a very improved plan. The report expressed a hope that happy results would be derived from the erection of cottages in the neighbourhood of London. The evil effect upon the working classes of their present accommodation was most conspicuous in the lodging-houses of the metropolis, where they paid 4s. 6d., 4s., or 3s. 6d., and never less than 2s. per week. In the buildings which were being constructed by them, the committee would not presume to say that they had fully attained their object, but they believed their experiment would be attended with the best effects. The buildings were erected in the form of a court, on the one side of which were eight buildings containing three rooms each, and two double houses capable each of containing two families. Of the single houses with three rooms the rent would be 6s. per week, rates and taxes included; and for the two double houses the rent would be 3s. 6d. per week. On the opposite side of the square there were four houses, each accommodating two families, offering on two floors' room, thirty rooms for widows and single women of a mature age, at 1s. 6d. a room per week. Thus twenty families and thirty single persons would become the tenants of the society. The contract for the works amounted to 3,916l., and they were situated at Pakenham-street, Lower-road, Pentonville."

We sincerely hope that in future works, we shall have no more courts.

THE OFFICIAL REFEREES.

We have avoided mentioning the arrangement made for filling the vacancy caused by the retirement of Mr. Higgins, because it seemed to us after all, uncertain and indefinite. As, however, it has now become matter of conversation in particular circles, we consider it right to put our readers in possession of the information. It appears that the duties of the Metropolitan Buildings Office render the appointment of a third referee desirable. The present Act, however, only empowers the election of two, and it has been determined therefore, at least so we are informed on good authority, to make no change at present (Mr. Higgins having consented to resume his office, *pro tempore*), and to bring in a bill early next session, to amend the Act in this and other respects. The appointments are promised to Mr. Tite and Mr. Ambrose Poynter, but so many things may occur before these appointments can be confirmed, that, as we said before, we should not have considered it right to mention the arrangement, if we had not found it generally spoken of. We hope no undue haste will be used in framing the amended Act, and that parties who have given consideration to it in its present shape, and have suggestions to offer, will have the opportunity of doing so afforded them. A recent modification of the Act will be found on another page.

SANITARY CONDITION OF LANCASTER.

The Metropolitan Health of Towns Association are anxious to select Lancaster as a model town, and with this view Mr. Chadwick has instituted inquiries there with an favourable result, that it is intended in the course of a few days to bring down eminent engineers to survey the locality, &c. "We," says the *Lancaster Guardian*, "understand that the company's terms are, that one-third of the requisite capital shall be contributed by the town, and the remainder by them, on condition of being secured in the possession of the liquid refuse, and other fertilising agents which the waste pipes and sewers may yield."